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SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: TENSIONS CONTINUE WITHIN MARITIME
POLICE

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¶1. (U) On August 8, Maritime Police officers announced in a press conference that on August 4 Minister of Transport Anaky Kobenan (leader of the MFA, an opposition party) had issued the payment of bonus arrears in the amount of USD 234,000 (CFAF 117 million) and suspended Director General for Maritime Affairs Jean-Christophe Tibet Bi Balou. In so doing, Anaky effectively met the demands of striking Maritime Police officers that had resulted in a violent clash between security and militia forces (reftel). During the press conference, the police officers announced their support for the Minister's actions and called for an audit of office accounts and the appointment of a new Director General in three months through an internal bidding process.

¶2. (U) Tibet Bi Balou resisted his suspension, reporting to work with an armed escort on August 8 at the Office of Maritime and Port Affairs. The new Acting Director General, Dassie Kobenan (a cousin of Minister Anaky), showed up as well, accompanied by his own security escort. Eventually, the former Director General and his guards left the building without incident. However, on August 10, roughly 20 Maritime Police officers loyal to Tibet Bi Balou besieged the Office of Maritime and Port Affairs and fired shots into the air in an effort to prevent the Acting Director General from entering, causing panic in the downtown district of Plateau where the office is located. These officers were confronted by another group of Maritime Police supporting Dassie Kobenan. The standoff required the intervention of Armed Forces (FANCI) Chief of Staff General Philippe Mangou. Mangou arrived on the scene, calmed the parties down, and invited the two factions for talks in his office.

¶3. (SBU) Lt. Yao Koffi, a Maritime Police officer who is a supporter of Tibet Bi Balou, told us that his side had resisted the suspension of the former Director General because the action was illegal absent a Presidential decree. He also complained that the new Acting Director General is a former

CUSTOMS OFFICERUUUer, i.e., from outside the Maritime Police.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Until the ipasse is resolved, there remains a potential for further clashes involving the maritime police. The situation may be exacerbated by those trying to undermine opposition Minister Anaky through support of Tibet Bi Balou and his faction.

Hooks